**Paper Cuttings**

Paper-cut is a very distinctive visual art of Chinese handicrafts. It originated from the 6th century when women used to paste golden and silver foil cuttings onto their hair at the temples, and men used them in sacred rituals. Later, they were used during festivals to decorate gates and windows. After hundreds of years' development, now they have become a very popular means of decoration among country folk, especially women.  
  
The main cutting tools are simple: paper and scissors or an engraving knife, but clever and deft craftspeople are remarkably good at cutting in the theme of daily life. When you look at items made in this method carefully, you will be amazed by the true to life expressions of the figure's sentiment and appearance, or portrayal of natural plants and animals' diverse gestures. Patterns of chrysanthemum display the curling petals, pied magpies show their tiny feathers and others such as a married daughter returning to her parents' home, or young people paying a New Year call to their grandparents.  
  
Although other art forms, like painting, can also show similar scenes, paper cutting still stands out for its charm - exacting lines and ingenious patterns which are all hand-made. To make the three-dimensional scenes pop out visually from the paper, as they are usually in monochrome, engravers must exert their imagination. They must delete secondary parts and compose the main body properly, abstractly and boldly. Though simple, the color then appears charmingly bright.  
  
It is easy to learn about cutting a piece of paper but very difficult to master it with perfection. One must grasp the knife in an upright fashion and press evenly on the paper with some strength. Flexibility is required but any hesitation or wiggling will lead to imprecision or damage the whole image. Engravers stress the cutting lines in several styles. They attempt to carve a circle like the moon, a straight line like a stem of wheat, a square like a brick, and jaggedly like the beard.  
  
People find hope and comfort in expressing wishes with paper cuttings. For example: for a wedding ceremony, red paper cuttings are a traditional and required decoration on the tea set, the dressing table glass, and on other furniture. A big red paper character 'Xi' (happiness) is a traditional must on the newlywed's door. Upon the birthday party of a senior, the character 'Shou' represents longevity and will add delight to the whole celebration; while a pattern of plump children cuddling fish signifies that every year they will be abundant in wealth